

LOCAL NEWS

Retired officer made mark as maverick

By JIM BOOTH
Of the Erie Daily Times

Col. John Boyd was more than a fighter pilot and an officer in the U.S. Air Force. When he retired in 1975 there were probably a lot of generals happy to see him go.

The Erie native was a military maverick. He admits it.

At different points in his military career he picked up such names as the "Mad Major" and "Genghis John." He was a "founder and organizer" of a group of Air Force officers and Pentagon officials that became known as the "Fighter Mafia."

"I'm very unorthodox in how I do business," he said.

His work has helped U.S. fighter pilots become the best in the world and helped give them the best planes to fly. He has also been credited with helping shape the tactics used to destroy the Iraqi army in Operation Desert Storm in early 1991.

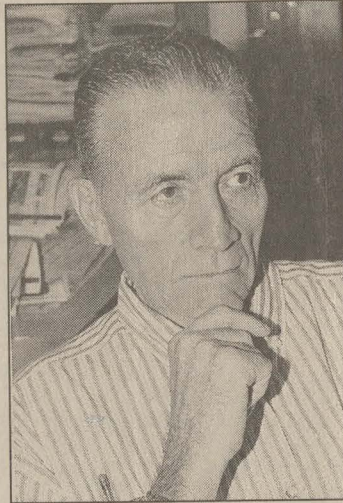
Early in his Air Force career, shortly after he jockeyed an F-86 through 22 missions in Korea, he became a member of the Fighter Weapons School at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada.

There he helped develop new fighter tactics that became a part of a study that "laid out maneuver and counter-maneuver logic for air-to-air combat." Later on he became involved in the design of some of the U.S. military's finest fighter planes.

It was during that time that he and some of his friends picked up the "mafia" label.

"We were the guys who laid out these new airplanes, some of which the Pentagon establishment didn't really want," Boyd said. "But there were always some senior officers who recognized that these things had to be done."

Those "things" became the F-15, the F-16 and F-18 fighters. Change is



Col. John Boyd

not easily accepted, especially in the military. "To change over to a new way of doing business did not go easy," Boyd said.

"We initiated a totally new way of looking at design and development of weapons systems. We used computers and a lot of calculations. We tested them. There was no arm waving," he said.

In developing the F-15 the "mafia" expanded the use of computers in the final design of the aircraft.

After retiring in 1975, Boyd continued to ruffle feathers in the Pentagon.

"I began an investigation into all forms of conflict, cooperation and competition," Boyd said.

During this work he delved into the military's operations manual. "I read it and said, 'This is garbage.'"

He criticized military tactics and strategy, "but with the idea of looking at new ways of doing it."

Some of those "new ways" were adopted and were used in the Persian Gulf War.

He had learned early that U.S. pilots won dogfights by assessing the situation faster and reacting faster. He called it "getting inside the enemy's OODA loop," or observation,

orientation, decision and action cycles.

Now a resident of Delray Beach, Fla., Boyd, 65, is visiting friends and relatives in the Erie area. On Wednesday he will speak at Strong Vincent High School's graduation ceremonies.

Boyd, who grew up on Lincoln Avenue, graduated from Strong Vincent in 1945.

After spending two years in the U.S. Army Air Force from 1945 to 1947, Boyd entered the University of Iowa and earned a degree in economics in 1951. He also received an Air Force commission through the ROTC program.

The Air Force later sent him to Georgia Tech where he earned a degree in industrial engineering.

He is married to the former Mary Bruce of Ottumwa, Iowa. They have three sons and two daughters.

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